

Outdoor FOCUS

THE QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE OWPG / SPRING 2025



The Editor Writes As I put the finishing touches to the spring issue of Outdoor Focus, I am already thinking ahead to the summer edition. I wonder what you'd like to see more of. In the committee meeting recently we discussed member benefits, and it prompted me to think about what Outdoor Focus offers as a benefit to members. It brings you news about events and changes in the Guild. It introduces new members and remembers the lives of those members who have passed on. It invites award submissions, gives us a preview of the forthcoming Big Weekend, and reports on the awards, activities and other gossip from the Big Weekend that has gone. All of that is important, but is also the bread and butter of every members' magazine. What other purpose does it serve?

Perhaps the most significant member benefit is the opportunity to showcase your work. Circulation is not only to members, but copies go to a wide range of publishers and other industry contacts. These are the people who may commission your work in the future. So, I'd like to invite you to submit outline proposals for features. 150 words and one sample image are all that is required initially, and if you've not published an article before, I'd



be happy to work with you on editing, as well as provide a tear sheet afterwards, to showcase your work on your own website or social media.

What else could Outdoor Focus do? Do you want more industry news? Perhaps you'd really like some interviews with industry figures. Are you interested in the latest developments or approaches in media tech? Would you like to see more photography, perhaps members' submissions on a theme or the season? At the present time, Outdoor Focus is limited to 16 pages for 3 of the issues to keep the weight within a certain level of postage cost. Paper copies are mailed to members and non-members can download a digital version from the website. Would you accept 'limited and relevant' advertising if it meant that Outdoor Focus could expand and do more without impacting membership fees? If you have views or ideas about what you'd like to see more of (or less), please do drop me a message at editor@owpg.org.uk. I'd love to hear from you.

I'd also like to add a special thanks to Rudolf Abraham for the stunning cover image.



p6-7 Rucksack Readers celebrates 25 successful years of publishing guidebooks

p16 Cicerone's Jonathan Williams considers the future of publishing



p12-13 Kevin Sene takes a look forward to the Big Weekend 2025 at the Blencathra Centre in the Lake District

p10-11 Sue Viccars reports from Dartmoor on the Southwest Regional Meet-up



p14-15 Roly Smith reviews the latest books



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The Outdoor Writers and Photographers Guild (OWPG) is the only UK-based association of media professionals working largely or entirely on outdoor subjects. Our membership covers every field of activity and all corners of the globe. We include writers, journalists, bloggers, photographers, publishers and editors, all with a passionate interest in the outdoors. For information on who we are, what we do, and where we've been, visit www.owpg.org.uk – or join us on Facebook.

New Members



Rachel Mead

© Graham Trott

Fifty-seven miles, two whopping blood blisters, and a new job. I have a lot to thank the River Parrett for.

The springs may burble away just over the border in Dorset, but the river itself is seen as the life blood of Somerset. Not only did I learn that gaiters are essential, even in August, whilst tracking a riverbank footpath for an intensive two day hike, but it was on this commission that I truly learnt how to become a travel writer.

On behalf of my client, I had been commissioned to write six articles about this infrequently followed trail for six different publications and websites. Without any editorial duplication, it was fair to say that I was, by the end of the project, a River Parrett nerd. My local librarian knew me by name and had the BBC Mastermind team approached me, I'd have been more than ready for their black leather chair!

As is so often with our line of work, the hours spent on the job certainly didn't make this the most profitable of commissions, but it reminded me why I had chosen travel journalism as my career - I was after all, getting paid to write about walking! As a consequence of writing one of those River Parrett articles for Somerset Life magazine, I now, a couple of years later, find myself in the commissioning role as Editor- it's funny how things ebb and flow. With Compeeds always at the ready, I'm anticipating what the next trail has in store.

Instagram @exploreandwriterrach

Rejoining Members

The Guild is pleased to welcome back former members, **Gordon Stainforth** who is known for his work in film and television as much as his travel and outdoor writing, and **Rudolf Abraham**, an award-winning travel writer, photographer and guidebook author specialising in central and southeast Europe.



Mike Parsons

Mike is a familiar face to many in the outdoor industry. A pioneering innovator and entrepreneur in outdoor equipment design and manufacturing. Mike grew a small family business founded in 1946. A bike shop with a small workshop making bike bags, into an international business making packs and garments, employing 300 people in two factories in Lancashire, UK.

As Karrimor, his iconic products included Whillans and Haston Alpiniste packs, the Karrimat, and KS-b boots. He supplied many leading expeditions, including Chris Bonington's Annapurna in 1970, Everest by the south-west face in 1975, the Ogre and Kongur. Karrimor was notable for the 'Lifetime guarantee', yet Mike was an early pioneer in the world of ultralight gear, too. Designing fast and light packs and clothing based on personal experiences and the Original Mountain Marathon, OMM, a brand he founded in 2004. His outdoor life began bike touring and racing, developing into the mountains, ski touring, sea-kayaking. He has expedition experience across 7 continents, including the first ascents of 18 summits in East Greenland and Kyrgyzstan.

Mike is recognised as the leading gear historian based on his co-authorship of 3 books;

1. Invisible on Everest, Innovation and the Gear Makers (2003, a complete history of all outdoor gear and clothing since 1800. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Invisible-Everest-Innovation-Gear-Makers/dp/0970414358>
2. Mallory Myths and Mysteries: The Mallory Replica Project (2006): a report of the research work carried for MHT Mountain Heritage Trust to replicate the Mallory layers using the scraps found when his body was found in 1999.
3. Keeping Dry and Staying Warm (2020), how to stay warm, dry or cool outdoors. The definitive book on how garments work and how to attain best performance from them.

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 See <https://www.clippings.me/outdoorgearcoach>.

Tom Waghorn

1932-2024

Guild Vice-President Roly Smith remembers the life and adventures of Tom Waghorn.

Tom Waghorn, one of the founding members of the Outdoor Writers' Guild and an outstanding and highly respected outdoor journalist for over 60 years, died in November last year, just a week before what would have been his 92nd birthday.

Tom was the consummate professional journalist, the chief sub-editor and later a feature writer for the Manchester Evening News. He was always ready with his notebook, keen to dig out a story, especially if there was a Manchester angle – which he usually managed to find.

Tom was born within shouting distance of Manchester United's ground at Old Trafford, Stretford – and, never a football fan, he was proud to say he never set foot inside. The eldest of four children, he moved to Glossop as a young child, where the family lived above an ironmonger's shop, and he was educated at Glossop Grammar School.



above Tom reporting from Pakistan in 1968 (Credit: Rucksack Club website)



above Tom and his wife Barbara

His first newspaper was across the Pennines at the Sheffield Star, and he later moved back over the Snake Pass to join the Manchester Evening Chronicle as a reporter. When the Chronicle folded in 1963, he joined on the Manchester Evening News.

Tom spent nearly half a century working for the MEN, working initially as postbag editor then spending 12 years as chief sub-editor before moving into what he called his "dream job" as a feature

writer and outdoor columnist. Despite officially retiring from the paper, he continued to write a weekly outdoors column for many years and travelled widely around the world with his late wife Barbara on travel features.

The then-MEN editor Maria McGeoghan said at his retirement: "Tom has been a fixture in the MEN newsroom for nearly 50 years and throughout that time he has been a great journalist and a true gent. Now he has decided to hang up his notebook for good we wish him well – but I'm sure he won't be able to resist ringing the newsdesk with tips for stories."

Outside his job, Tom was part of the great post-war Mancunian working class revolution in rock climbing and partnered routes in the Peak District and Snowdonia with such aces as Joe Brown and Don Whillans. He was a long-standing member of Manchester's famous Rucksack Club and a regular contributor to its journal.

One of the great adventures in which he took part in those

days was the Manchester Karakoram Expedition of 1968. Tom persuaded the Manchester Evening News to part-sponsor a group of Manchester climbers to plant the MEN flag on the summit of the unclimbed Malubiting (24,451 feet/7,458 m), in return for him providing exclusive reports for the trip.

The hard-up climbers couldn't afford the flight, so they commandeered an ex-Army Bedford truck and decided to drive the 4,000 miles to get there, which gave rise to one of Tom's favourite stories which he often delighted in retelling.

"We were stopped at the border crossing into Pakistan after we had accidentally demolished the crossing point with the truck," he recounted. "We were arrested, and things were looking bad until I produced my passport. The border guard said: 'Oh, you're from Manchester. Manchester United. Do you know Bobby Charlton?'"

"Bobby Charlton? Yes, he's a personal friend of mine, I lied. And with that he let us through!"

The expedition eventually reached about 19,000 feet on Malubiting but was aborted after a climber died following a rock fall.

Tom was one of the last surviving original members of the Guild, which was founded in the bar of the Old Swan Hotel in Harrogate in 1980. He was a life member and served on the committee and as my loyal and supportive vice chairman for 12 years. I was introduced to Tom as a fellow daily paper journalist at the Outdoor Leisure Show at Harrogate by

Walt Unsworth, our late president. I was immediately impressed, because that day he grabbed an interview with Sir Edmund Hillary and typically asked him the question that nobody had dared to ask: who, between him and Tensing Norgay, had reached the summit of Everest in 1953 first?

Tom was a regular participant in facility trips organised by Terry Marsh and later by Stan Abbott. We enjoyed many memorable adventures together, including trips to Arctic Norway and Svalbard, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands, in addition to regular trips to Ireland, Shetland and the Scottish Highlands and Islands.

Tom was a great ambassador for the Guild, always popular with our hosts, unfailingly polite and grateful and producing good, tight copy. He was a keen birdwatcher but a slow, if steady, walker. Many were the times we reached a summit with Tom nowhere in sight. Our guides would express their concern, but we knew Tom was a mountain man through and through, and sure enough, he'd appear a few minutes later.

He survived Covid, but hadn't enjoyed good health in recent years and died on November 30 last year after a fall in which he fractured his hip. There was no memorial service to Tom, but the family, led by his daughter Helen and grandson Matthew, scattered his ashes at a favourite spot at Calf Close Bay, Derwentwater, to join those of his late wife, Barbara.

Tom Waghorn's legacy will always be his unfailing professionalism, his tremendous back catalogue of journalistic work, and his lovable, if at times curmudgeonly, nature.

right Tom survived Covid



Former Guild Chair Stan Abbott looks back at the life of long-standing member, writer, organiser and campaigner David Ramshaw.

'Farewell to an unambiguous and tenacious optimist'

So farewell, then, David Ramshaw. You had your creative and organisational finger in so very many pies.

Well, for starters, David was synonymous with the OWPG for about as long as I can remember, but the long list of his other affections was both broad and sharply focussed, not least upon his local community, in Carlisle.



above David on the Long Mynd at the Big Weekend (Photo © Alex Rodddie)

There's a curious thing about aging – we can see it happen to others, feel it happen to ourselves and yet strangely we don't always clock that death is the inevitable end-point of aging.

David attended the OWPG's Big Weekend in Shropshire last October, as he always did, and arrayed the fruits of his P3 Publishing operation on a large table... as he always did. On the Saturday he joined a walk on the Long Mynd, on which I noticed that he was flagging noticeably by the end. He'd been receiving treatment for cancer.

The following day, Sunday, David did something unlike his normal self: he packed away his books and headed home early. On Monday he received a terminal diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. He didn't make it to Christmas.

David's service to the Guild was both long and dedicated: he was a committee member of long standing when I first joined it in 2017, and had organised the awards process for some years. He was a regular attendee on Zoom sessions and participant in locally organised events, including a ramble around Kirkby Stephen a little over two years ago. His two dogs, inevitably, were with him that day and he was looking forward to joining a walk I was organising to the summit of the privately owned Swinside Hill, near Derwentwater.

Born in Hull, David graduated from Newcastle, where he met his future wife, Sylvia, at a dance, and had to remember her phone number by writing it on the steamed-up window of his train home.

David Ramshaw

1941-2024

But it was in Carlisle that David practised his community activism, having taught Physics at Carlisle Technical College and at Trinity School, in the city, where he founded an astronomy club for pupils. He teamed up with the Border Astronomical Society to secure funding for an observatory at the school, which was opened by Heather Couper, President of the British Astronomical Association, in 1988 – all achieved for just £7,000.

He was a Duke of Edinburgh Award leader, Group Controller with the Royal Observer Corps, a governor at Belle Vue School, Carlisle, and a member of a dog-walking group there, and his many local history books, published under his own P3 Publications imprint, covered all aspects of local history in his adopted city. He also published local history books by other authors and enthusiasts and recorded in photographs and print major events in Cumbria, including the various devastating floods that hit Carlisle, Cockermouth and Workington earlier this century.

He also ventured further afield, securing a commission to create a bilingual (England German) walking guidebook to the Haldikiki peninsulas, in northern Greece – a project of which he was especially proud.

On the eve of his funeral, I was watching a BBC programme called Villages by the Sea and featuring Port Carlisle, when who should appear on screen but David, the greatest living authority on the Carlisle Navigation Canal, which once carried ocean-going ships from the Irish Sea to the heart of Carlisle.

David died in Eden Valley Hospice, Carlisle, aged 83, where, his daughter Louise told me, he continued to plan and organise things to the last.

The packed crematorium at his funeral in Carlisle was testament to the many lives he touched. Louise wrote a touching poem that was read by his grandchildren. Now the family plans to scatter his ashes on Blencathra this Spring.

David was also the driving force behind a project whose aim was to preserve a disused viaduct on the Waverley railway line, from Carlisle to Edinburgh, so as to create a new pedestrian and cyclist crossing of the River Eden to the west of Carlisle city centre. It would be a fitting legacy if this ambitious project could yet be realised by his surviving fellow campaigners.

right David Ramshaw with his dogs, pictured outside The old Forge, Kirkby Stephen, after a northern OWPG members and friends walk in 2022, with (from left) Chris Stewart, Stan Abbott, Andrew Read, Jordan Gregory, and June Abbott



Rucksack Readers celebrates 25 years of guidebook publishing



Having never previously walked a long-distance path, Jacquetta Megarry and friends chose to walk the West Highland Way, to each celebrate their 50th year. Out there in classic Scottish weather, wrestling with a rain-pulped guidebook and clinging to a map behaving more like a mainsail, she could not have foreseen how much that first long walk would impact her life. Now, many long hikes later, Jacquetta celebrates the 25th anniversary of Rucksack Readers, the guidebook publishing company that she subsequently founded.

David So, Jacquetta, tell me about your background prior to Rucksack Readers and what made you completely switch career to become a publisher of guidebooks?

Jacquetta I merely stumbled into publishing. I had worked in academia, specialising in educational innovation, I'd been the editor of a peer-reviewed journal, and for some time I worked freelance undertaking consultancy. I used the income from that to fund publishing my first book.

From 1993-2013 I'd lived in Dunblane, with a view of 13 Munros from the house. That changed me, I had to climb them. I really loved that first walk on the West Highland Way in 1998 too, although it wasn't until 18 months later – after climbing Kilimanjaro – that I founded Rucksack Readers. Summitting Kilimanjaro was an experience that gave me the self-belief to take the plunge.

David Had you written any guidebooks prior to forming Rucksack Readers, and what was it that motivated you to publish your own?

Jacquetta No, I'd never written a guidebook, but I've been some kind of author all my life. My best training was in Piccolo

Factbooks for 11-14 year olds. Having to explain artificial intelligence in an intellectually honest form inside 400 words really taught me to be concise. I learned so much about writing on that project.

David So how did you get started?

Jacquetta In 2000, I started with guides to the Speyside Way and the West Highland Way. I created a format that seemed to overcome the disadvantages that I'd found with other guidebooks. Some had acres and acres of undifferentiated text, you'd get some Wordsworth, some philosophy, the geology, myth and folklore and some poetry, then it would say 'don't miss the turning after the footbridge', by which time you'd already

missed it! My experience is that people on a walking holiday are short of time, so I keep the route description very concise, as bullet points. Anything that's a side-trip is clearly identified in a side-panel, and background information such as wildlife and heritage is in a separate section that can be read ahead of time.

David It sounds like you had a very clear vision about how you wanted to present

Outdoor Focus Editor David Jordan caught up with founder Jacquetta Megarry to reflect on the success of the venture.



the guides, do you feel you've maintained that over the years?

Jacquetta Yes, every book has the same four-part structure: route-specific planning and preparation, background info, concise route description and reference material. We also major on great photography, typically with about 100 photos in each book and 12-18 pages of mapping. And of course they're rainproof!

All generic advice about clothing and equipment and so on is on the website. I've always been interested in the relationship between the website and the printed guidebook. The website is at the heart of our business. That's where the relationship with customers is built. Customers talk to us all the time. If there's something they don't like, or if something has changed on a route, they'll be quick to tell us. I really enjoy this dialogue.

The vision has been maintained, yes, and the structure has worked, but some things had to change. After Covid happened, suddenly we were giving away more books than we sold. Some of the stories were heart-breaking and I felt humbled that people were so pleased with a free guidebook.

We had to look hard at costs. We'd started out with a very expensive 'concealed wire-binding'. It lies completely flat, but we had to find a more cost-effective method. So in 2000 we switched to perfect binding (glued and sewn), which was lighter and more pocket-friendly. I had expected to be criticised by customers for the change.

All photographs © Mike Bell and feature in the RR CATERAN TRAIL guide, RRP £15.99.

OPPOSITE TOP: Den o' Alyth; BELOW: Auchintaple Loch; ABOVE: Lochan; RIGHT: Glenisla.

We only ever had a couple of protests – far outweighed by the number of people who liked the change.

David What's been the most rewarding aspect of becoming a publisher?

Jacquetta The real pleasure has been in building a list, developing a house style, and having a distinctive methodology. We take very seriously the goal that people using our books do not get lost. If an author produces a route description, I'll test it by walking the route based on that text alone. If I have to get the map out, then we'll improve the description. If I am the author, then someone else will do the 'stranger test' for me. We commission the maps specially, and provide distances in both metric and imperial. The text, picture, caption and map all have to work together. It's like a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle, it's quite a challenge to make it all fit within 72 or 80 pages.

David What about the challenges you've faced or difficult decisions?

Jacquetta Perhaps the biggest ongoing challenge is commissioning the right titles. On many trails, there is no competing guidebook, which sounds great, but may reflect very low walker numbers.

And you have to learn by your mistakes. I've had to learn to avoid being seduced into printing too many by the apparent economy of a long print run.

David What advice would you give to anyone considering getting into a publishing related venture?

Jacquetta You have to do something different from what's already out there. We only do books for long-distance walks, not short walks, pub walks, doggie walks or whatever. Our main market is folk who want to spend about a week walking: that's our niche.

Be aware of the challenge: most people expect information to be online and free. Also avoid print on demand if you want the ultimate quality in colour repro. Colour publishing is a really complicated process. I started knowing nothing, and had a steep learning curve.

David Finally, what does the future hold for you, and for Rucksack Readers?

Jacquetta I tend not to plan too far ahead. Typically, I'm completely immersed in the current project. On Friday that was literally! Wading knee-deep in the River Tay that had flooded its riverside path, just when I had gone to research our forthcoming guidebook.

Rucksack Readers can be found at www.rucsacs.com

OWPG members can receive a 25% discount on books by quoting the code 'owpg'



The Gorge, the Devilry

Towering above me were unforgiving razor-edged peaks gnawed by 300 million years of erosion; below me was a merciless drop into the rushing torrent of River Bode.

With the last and finest stage of Harzer-Hexen-Stieg or The Harz Witches Trail behind me, I was on my way to the Hexentanzplatz or "Witches' Dance Floor" overseeing the Bode Gorge.

Here, the path transformed into an intimidating and precarious rock ascent. Even the geology of this calamitous canyon seemed cruel and stern, bringing to mind devilry and Faustian myth: Ramberg granite, Knotenschiefer, bewitching slate pierced with tantalising minerals, and Hornfels – the term translating into horned stones, metamorphic rocks baked and hardened in the infernal conditions.

But if you seek blood-curdling stories, horripilation, devilry and witchcraft, then I am going to disappoint you.

For nothing is as it seems...

The Bode Gorge is the oldest nature reserve in Germany, and home to rare flora and fauna. Ravine and scree forest dominate the slopes. Cracked barks and ferns surround the steep path, across which in the spring run black and yellow Fire Salamanders.

Woodpeckers and Flycatchers are calling in the canopies of gnarled old beeches and sycamores, bringing to mind Teutonic fairy tales.

Each ledge provides a window into the deep valley and the tantalising textures of the gorge's silvery and copper granite walls haphazardly hewn by the chisel of time.

I have not beheld such beauty and diversity anywhere in the world. Mesmerised, I lost myself with my hand lens amongst the forest floor, until I came to my senses and realised that I still had to reach the Hexentanzplatz and climb down to my car before the darkness set.

The path grew steeper yet smoother, with fuchsia-coloured foxgloves walling me off from the drop. The summit was percolated with the warmth of the late June sun, releasing a spellbinding scent of heath and dainty white star-shaped flowers.

The path forked away towards a viewing point; but before I climbed the bouldery steps onto the platform an incongruous sight drew my attention. A letter box? Geocache? No – it was a stamp checkpoint – one of 222 strewn across the Harz Mountains, tempting with the promise of Bronze, Silver or even Golde badge and the honourable title of "hiking King".

Not having the collection booklet, I stamped my map – more as a memento than a trophy – and clambered onto the viewing platform.

"Ah! at this spectacle through every sense,
What sudden ecstasy of joy is flowing!
I feel new rapture, hallow'd and intense,
Through every nerve and vein with ardour glowing".

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Faust, First Part

Was it what Goethe felt, standing here three centuries ago? Immortalised in Faust? I certainly did. An awe of the vastness before me, the magnificence of rocky outcrops and ravines. A thirst for knowing, understanding, belonging, and connecting to the land and nature.

Does it mean an inevitable damnation for anyone curious? I hope not. The story of Doctor Faustus was based on the 16th Century chemist and astronomer feared and condemned by medieval minds and turned into a cautionary tale that anyone who practises these dark arts of science was to be denounced as of hellish import...

Speaking of which, the "Witches' Dance Floor" awaited me with its spells of confusion and being lost amidst kitsch installations, diversions and closed walking routes...

and the Connection to Nature

Bodetal Climb, Harz Mountains, Saxony, Germany

Dee Anna is a science and outdoor journalist, the OWPG's Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Officer, and editor of The Introvert.

MAIN IMAGE: The Peaks of Bodetal

Southwest Regional Meet-up

Dartmoor – 18 & 19 January 2025 Sue Viccars

I have a confession: I can't remember when I joined the (then) Outdoor Writers Guild. I know it was sometime in the late 1990s, during my twenty-year stint as a commissioning editor at David & Charles Publishers. In those days the annual OWG meeting took the form of a dinner at a Manchester hotel on a Sunday night, at the end of (I think) an outdoors trade fair...

How things have changed! That event has morphed into our excellent annual AGM weekends, and the title of the Guild has expanded to include (quite rightly) photographers. And regional meet-ups, too, seem to have extended their reach – in terms of location – away from lands 'oop north!' Although Southwest members have always been few and far between, in mid-January this year Josephine Collingwood took the plunge and hosted possibly the first-ever

get-together in 'our' neck of the woods: deepest darkest Devon.

And what a great time we had! Josephine lives on the west side of Dartmoor, and I on the east. We were joined by Josephine's husband Coll, along with campervanners from Surrey (Jacint and Nike) and South Wales (Chris and Judith), plus Lise Drewe and husband Charlie, who came down from Wiltshire for the Saturday. Around midday we gathered in the car park at Belstone, on the moor's northern edge, and set off for a 12km or so exploration. Conditions were misty and chilly, with a light wind. The picturesque granite village sits in the shadow of Cosdon Hill, an impressively large 550m dome overlooking the valley of the River Taw. Those of you who have ever driven west along the A30 towards Okehampton cannot fail to have noticed it.

Our route took us over Watchet Hill – with somewhat opaque views towards

Dartmoor's highest tops, Yes Tor (619m) and High Willhays (621m) – and down to Cullever Steps, crossing the infant East Okement River. We entered the Dartmoor Training Area (the Army has used Dartmoor for training purposes since around 1875), picking up a rough military road. Josephine led us to an old artillery target railway on the northeast slope of West Mill Tor, one of three in the area thought to date from the late nineteenth century, once used for live firing exercises. From there we did a spot of tor hopping: first East Mill Tor, then Oke Tor, then three along the Belstone ridge. We crossed the dilapidated Irishman's Wall, torn down by angry locals when a 'foreigner' tried to grab land in the early nineteenth century. In fading light, we visited Nine Maidens Stone Circle, likely remnants of a Bronze Age burial

chamber. More romantically, the stones are said to be dancers, turned to stone for dancing on the Sabbath and condemned to do so every day at noon, for eternity...

After an excellent pub meal at the Tors Inn we headed to Josephine and Coll's place at Chillaton for more drinks and convivial chat, before turning in.

On Sunday the weather was a little colder, with significantly better visibility. Today's start point was on the western edge of the moor, near Lydford. We crossed the River Lyd then ascended to Bray (Brat) Tor, crowned with 'Widgery Cross', instigated by local landscape artist F. J. Widgery to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887. A stomp across Dartmoor's challenging purple moor grass tussocks gained the crumbling ruin of Bleak House, a mine captain's home, built in the late 1870s – along with a railway and drying kilns – to serve the Rattlebrook Peat Works. From there we ambled along the old railway trackbed below magnificent Great Links Tor (586m), passing resilient drifts of snow, before following the pretty River Lyd back to the stepping-stones and car park.

And the benefits of this whole exercise? Well, apart from the lively exchanges of views and information which come naturally when on the hill with like-minded colleagues, I sorted out important 'passing on a magazine to a new owner' queries with Chris and Judith, encouraging me to take the necessary action. Jacint posted about the weekend on LinkedIn, which pushed me to update my profile. We all gleaned fascinating geological information from Josephine, and I chipped in odd bits of local knowledge. And – most importantly – we're all determined to do it again, and now have South Wales in our sights!



Photos: Opposite top, A murky start ©Josephine Collingwood; Opposite bottom, Lyd stepping-stones ©Jacint Mig; Above top, Dartmoor hill ponies ©Jacint Mig; Above middle, Belstone Ridge ©Chris Howes; Above bottom, OWPG members group ©Josephine Collingwood

Big Weekend 2025

Kevin Sene looks ahead to this year's event



The Blencathra Centre, with Castlerigg Stone Circle below
 PHOTO Ronald Turnbull OPPOSITE Blencathra Centre terrace and meeting room; Penrith-Keswick bus stops off at Threlkeld PHOTOS Kevin Sene



Blencathra Field Studies Centre Threlkeld, near Keswick: 3-6 October 2025

The northern Lake District

This year will see a return to the northern part of the Lake District, where well known peaks include Blencathra (868m), Skiddaw (931m) and Helvellyn (950m). We will be staying at the Field Studies Council's Blencathra Centre, situated at a height of about 300m up the mountain of the same name. The centre is about 5-6 miles from Keswick by road and within easy walking distance of Threlkeld's mining museum and Castlerigg Stone Circle, which is one of the oldest in the UK.

FSC Blencathra

The centre has a large main building with accommodation over several floors and several outbuildings with further accommodation. In addition to great views of the Lake District fells, we will have exclusive use of a large meeting room with an annex alongside for workshops. Most of

the accommodation will be in ensuite twin bed or bunkbed rooms with a modest single room supplement as usual. The centre has a strong focus on renewable energy and generates most of its power from micro-hydropower, solar and biomass sources.

Programme for the weekend

The weekend will have the usual mix of workshops and outdoor activities plus the AGM, meal and awards ceremony on the Saturday evening. A walk up Blencathra seems a must and the centre can offer a session to



learn more about their renewable energy sources. There will also be the option of a boat trip on Derwent Water with rowing boat hire for the more adventurous. In addition to its two local history museums, nearby Keswick is sometimes said to have the highest density of outdoor shops in the UK so could be a good place to stock up on kit too. As usual, the book table will give the chance to see what other members have been working on and to buy copies of books and photographs if you wish.

Getting there

The centre is reached via a minor road that climbs out from the village of Threlkeld, which is just a short way off the A66 between Penrith and Keswick. There is a regular Stagecoach bus service to the village from Penrith railway station and from there it's a scenic 30-40 minute walk and 500 foot climb along a minor road to the centre. The Setmabanning caravan park is near to Threlkeld on the opposite

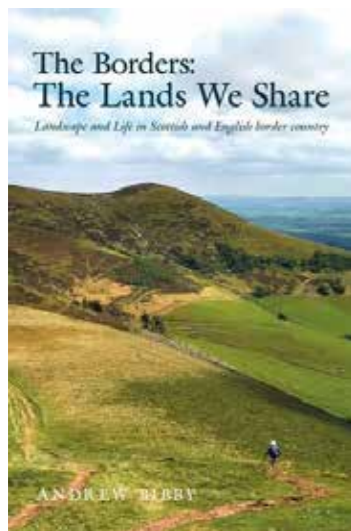
side of the A66 and has hardstanding and electrical hookup facilities for motorhomes.

Next steps

So that's the plan so far and we hope you can make it for what should be an interesting and enjoyable social weekend away. New members are particularly welcome and you can take part in as many or as few activities as you like. Check-in should be available from mid afternoon on the Friday with the programme starting that evening and running through to the Sunday evening. Many members stay the full three nights leaving after breakfast on the Monday but you are welcome to make a shorter trip if you wish. We'll be sending out an initial email in late April with more detailed plans, and bookings will then open in late May. Hope to see you there.



OWPG's Roly Smith reviews the latest outdoor books



The Borders: The Lands We Share

Andrew Bibby
Gritstone Publishing, £15 (pb)

Firstly, it must be said that I found the title a little arbitrary, as this 200-mile walk from Edinburgh to Catterick deals only with the Scotland-England border, when it could equally apply to Wales-England. The last 20-odd miles pass through Yorkshire which, although it may sometimes regard itself as a separate country, is still legally part of England.

The author chose his idiosyncratic route by following the possible line taken by a 300-strong Dark Age army from Edinburgh (*Din Eidyn*) to do battle at a place called *Catraeth*, which is generally believed to be Catterick, as described in *Y Gododdin*, a 7th century poem written by the Welsh poet Aneirin.

And although history always plays an important role in the author's entertaining description of the route, the greatest strength of his book is the comprehensive survey of the ownership, management, conservation and access to this countryside that he passes through.

His description of the long and painful campaign which eventually gave us our 15 National Parks is one of the best I've ever read. And he is equally thorough and detailed in his research on the subjects of land, water and nature conservation and management.

His aim, as outlined in his first chapter, is to "try to understand better how and

why the Scottish and English borderlands look the way they do." And he succeeds brilliantly in this superbly researched and executed book. Highly recommended.

The Hillwalking Bible

Ronald Turnbull
Conway/Bloomsbury, £22 (pb)

And the First Lesson, according to Prophet Turnbull, is that walking up hills is "what legs and lungs were made for."

In his usual sardonic but eminently readable style, Turnbull is hoping this latest handbook on "where to go, what to take and how to not get lost" will encourage walkers to go a little farther than the well-beaten paths to our hill summits.



He suggests that the first recorded account of walking purely for pleasure dates from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's nine-day hike around the Lake District in 1802. But it was meeting two innocent walkers at Burnmoor Tarn, on the old corpse road from Wasdale Head, having enjoyed their day up and down the busiest path on England's highest hill from one of its busiest car parks, that inspired him to write the book. He says he hopes it "will take you a little farther... or a whole lot farther over the hundreds of hills the UK has to offer."

Chapters on gear, mapping, route-finding, scrambling and walking with children and/or dogs, plus long-distance walking routes, backpacking and wild camping and running are interspersed with details of 18, OS-mapped routes throughout the UK to tempt the reader to follow in the footsteps of the prophet and "go a little farther." But whether it is wise to suggest that

If you have a recent book that you'd like us to review here, please get in touch with the Editor (see page 2)

Blencathra via the Hall's Fell ridge, or a 60-mile stint on the West Highland Way from Dalmally is feasible to a hillwalking beginner is open to question. To be fair, most of Turnbull's suggested routes are far easier than those.

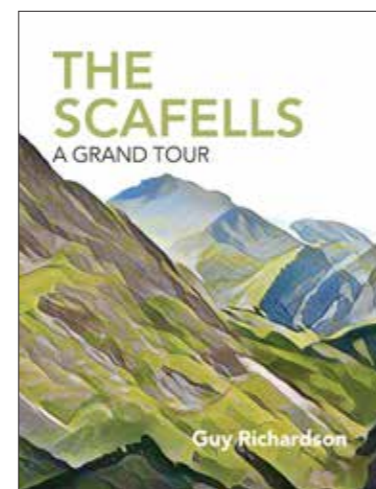
However, if you can find the hillfort of Castle Naze in the White Peak, as the author states in his caption, you are definitely on the wrong route. It stands firmly in the gritstone Dark Peak above Chapel-en-le-Frith.

Entertaining boxes with headings like "On not going up Ben Nevis", "But I'm never going to get on to all those 282 hilltops (the Munros, am I?)" and "Ten ways up Snowdon (not counting the train)" give a flavour of the author's light, often humorous approach, making this not so much a handbook to take on the hill, but a volume to be enjoyed with a stiff dram by your fireside.

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Scafells: A Grand Tour

Guy Richardson
Lakeland Views Publishing, £11.95 (pb)



England's highest mountain Scafell Pike is often dismissed by seasoned hill-goers as boring and uninteresting, the target of summit baggers and Three Peak charity sloggers.

But this fascinating and beautifully produced book by former Cumbria County Council planner Guy Richardson puts the record straight. Among a plethora of minutely researched facts about the Scafells, he explains the naming of Scafell Pike (singular) wasn't formally adopted by the Ordnance Survey until the 1970s,

and appears to have been done almost by accident, having been the plural Scafell Pikes for many years before. Of course, the Scafells are so much more than their reigning summit, and the author comprehensively delves into the geology, history and attractions of Scafell, Broad Crag and the northern outlier Great End in the course of a meandering 12-mile (20km) "perambulation" from Wasdale via Sty Head, the Corridor Route, a traverse of the range descending to Esk Hause to Mosedale and Cockley Beck. No one knows who made the first ascent of the 3,208 ft (978m) summit, but it's likely to have been a Neolithic man in search of the greenstone with which to fashion their axe heads, or a Wasdale shepherd in search of a missing Herdwick. Some of the more illustrious summiters have included "the Mad Poet" Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose 1802 descent of Broad Stand between Scafell and Scafell Pike still sends tingles up the spine, and pioneering rock climber O G Jones.



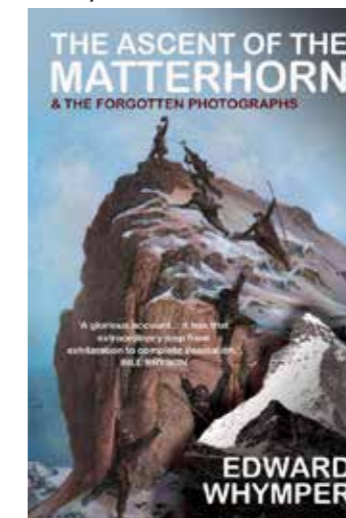
National Parks of the United Kingdom

Carey Davies
Max Ström, £40 (hb)

This hefty, rather expensive, 270-page coffee table book by the former *Great Outdoors* editor looks sumptuous at first sight. But closer inspection reveals it to be more of a picture book than a comprehensive guide to the 15 UK National Parks.

A cover sticker says it marks the 75th anniversary of the National Parks Act – although this is not mentioned in the text. The author also fails to mention the two more recently added aims of our National Parks, alongside those to conserve and enhance the landscape, wildlife, and cultural heritage. They are to promote understanding and enjoyment of the parks, and most importantly, the support of local communities.

Trying to cover all the parks in any depth in one book is difficult (I know, I've tried) and necessarily it means that only a few pages can be devoted to each. But when about 120 of those pages are taken up by huge, double-page picture spreads, some of dubious quality, the task becomes even more difficult. Consequently, the editorial coverage is quite cursory and misses out on many aspects of the parks – particularly, I felt, the constant and never-ending threats to their supposedly-officially protected countryside.



The Ascent of the Matterhorn & the Forgotten Photographs

Edward Whymper
Gibson Square, £20 (hb)

It's 160 years since Edward Whymper and Michel Croz reached the summit of the Matterhorn (14,692 ft; 4,478 m), for long thought to be an impossible and inaccessible dream during the so-called Golden Age of Alpine exploration. And Whymper's account of that momentous and ultimately tragic climb was told in his classic *The Ascent of the Matterhorn*, first published in 1880 with Whymper's beautiful wood engraved illustrations. Less well known is that Whymper was also a pioneering mountain photographer, the first to take a camera in the Alps to record scenes which he would later turn into drawings for his wood engravings. That fact has been addressed by the publication of this latest reprinting of Whymper's book including 56 of his photographs accompanied by his original engravings. But the unfortunate thing is that the publisher has chosen to run the photographs in the text and not to reproduce them as separate plates. This has obvious effects on their clarity and definition, which distracts from what is otherwise a fascinating new look at this

classic in mountaineering literature. The rather unexpected provider of the foreword is the former Prime Minister Theresa May, who famously when asked by an interviewer what was the "naughtiest thing" she had ever done, said she used to "run through the fields of wheat." But Mrs May apparently shares Whymper's love of the Alps, although on a couple of times she states that he "tamed" the mountain, which is quite at odds with current mountaineering philosophy.

Exploring Scotland's Islands

Terry Marsh
Conway/Bloomsbury, £20 (pb)
Guest Review: David Jordan

This is book that quickly dispels a common myth of the Scottish islands, that they are a largely flat, treeless and barren place, where outings are regaled with a liberal scattering of adjectives like 'bracing'. Indeed, I noted with surprise, Giant Sequoia and Palm among the unexpected trees that crop up in the book's captivating photography that features a wealth of colour and intriguing detail. Vaulted cathedral ceilings, secret gardens, shipwrecks and castles all conspire to astound any uninformed browser lured in by the modern and colourful cover. Structured around the main groupings of islands, this is not however a guide. I found myself yearning for a little more in the way of maps to support the inevitable planning that will follow, and the less-regular walker may not immediately realise that the bracketed numbers and letters



are in fact map grid references. This does not however detract from the book's main purpose which it undoubtedly achieves, that of inspiration. The author's own long fascination with these islands is apparent throughout and the result is a thoroughly enjoyable tour, even from the comfort of an armchair with a dram of an island single malt.



The Future of Publishing

Jonathan Williams of Cicerone Press looks ahead

Publishing has been around for a long time. Jane Austen had a publisher. Cicero had a publisher, Julius Ceasar had a publisher. Euripides had a publisher. Even the Assyrian emperor Sargon had minions to carve his edicts into stone. Civilisation was preserved for hundreds of years in monastic scriptoria – the publishers of their day.

Why did they all have publishers? Well, Sargon we know; he was too busy smiting Israelites, and everyone else. But the others all needed help to get their message out, design the product, find the readers and earn them income. They probably needed editing too. The fundamental role of a publisher is to understand the mind of the consumer and help the author feed that mind.

The world is ever changing. Publishing is always evolving – wood block gave way to moveable type, scrolls to books, newspapers to television, the internet, eBooks, podcasts, apps and now to AI. These are all forms of publishing. And publishing has always adapted.

Recently things have accelerated. It's fair to say that the internet has given more in terms of audience access than it has taken. How far this is changing is unclear as yet, but experience suggests it is.

Let me broadly distinguish two forms of publishing; inspirational, by which I mean stories and experiences, maybe

photographic and even fiction. And informative, which includes factual and guide type books.

Inspirational publishing has always depended on the quality of the author and the ability of a publisher to get a message out that readers didn't know they needed. The demand is there – we have only to look at *Touching the Void*, *The Salt Path* and others. It's a broad field, covering all aspects of travel of which outdoor is a part: a small part perhaps but an important part.

The late great Ken Wilson used to talk about his books becoming 'becalmed'. From a publisher's point of view, only a few books will 'make it'. Many of these have already been written, the world has

its strengths and weaknesses, none do all of the job.

But the fundamental here is that if it doesn't add real value to the user, the publisher and likely the author as well will fail.

So information based publishers will need to embrace the opportunities here. This certainly includes careful crafting of the content of current publications, truly understanding who it's for and what they need. It's imperative to have the consumer in mind. Only geniuses do their own thing, and they mostly starve.

It also includes the need for new delivery methods. This will include digital and inspirational ways of exciting consumers

From a publisher's point of view, only a few books will 'make it'. Many of these have already been written...

been explored. There is a danger of books becoming ever more focussed on narrower and narrower identity groups.

But great writing will win out. With great marketing it will find an audience.

Information publishing faces challenges too. Authors and publishers operate in an ecosystem with magazines, books, websites, YouTube, TV, routes databases, tour companies, maps, apps and other media adding to the human experience of people passing knowledge along. Each of these has

and introducing new ideas to them. This will mean ensuring route details are there on walkers' phones for example. But it includes much more as well.

It's clear that publishers and authors are in this together, one as creator the other to craft material that consumers need, market it and nurture the whole process. Is this going to get harder? Probably yes.

If your publisher isn't doing this, you have some hard questions to ask, of them, and of yourself.



The Aiguille Noire and Grandes Jorasses on the Tour du Mont Blanc
ABOVE The cirque of 4000m peaks above Zinal – Weisshorn Zinalrothorn, Ober Gabelhorn, Dent Blanche – from the trail between Evolène and Grimentz PHOTOS Jonathan Williams